

The Peaks

More than a billion years ago, the Black Mountains were formed. This mighty range of peaks once stood lofty and rugged. But over millions of years, wind, water and other forces wore down the pinnacles to their rounded, more subdued profile of today. Only the erosion-resistant igneous and metamorphic rocks allowed Mount Mitchell to retain its dramatic height of 6,684 feet.

Because of the even elevation of its ridgeline, the Black Mountain range was referred to as a single mountain until the late 1850s. Of the separate peaks that have since been designated, six are among the 10 highest in the eastern United States. Although the Black Mountain range is higher, its length and breadth do not equal that of the nearby Blue Ridge or Great Smoky Mountains. From the air, the range bears the shape of the letter J. The distance between the range's end points, Yeates Knob and Celo Knob is 15 miles.

The climate of the Black Mountains is more like that of Canada than North Carolina. Extremely cold temperatures during the Pleistocene Era allowed the plants and animals of more northern latitudes to extend their ranges to the south, but as warmer climates returned, these cold-adapted species became restricted to the highest peaks. Therefore, many of the plants and animals of Mount Mitchell are much like those native to more northern alpine environments.

Facilities

Concession stand/gift shop: A concession stand and gift shop, adjacent to the summit parking lot, is open daily from May through October. Light snacks, crafts and books may be purchased. Restrooms are also available.

Restaurant: Enjoy a relaxing meal in the restaurant located approximately half a mile from the park office. Open May through October, hungry hikers and tourists will enjoy the restaurant's food as well as its scenic views.

Education Center: A fully equipped classroom is available for groups.

Picnic area/Picnic shelters: Forty picnic tables, grills and two day-use shelters are located at the north end of the summit parking lot. The two picnic shelters with fireplaces are perfect for groups and are free of charge unless reservations are requested.

Museum: The exhibit hall, located next to the gift shop, is open daily May through October. It offers visitors insight into the mountain's natural, cultural and historical aspects.



Flora & Fauna

When Andre Michaux and Elisha Mitchell explored the Black Mountains in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, they documented forests with an extraordinary variety of plant species. Red spruce covered the upper slopes and Fraser fir dominated the peaks above 6,000 feet. Hardwood forests, including majestic stands of American chestnut, oaks and hickories, populated the slopes below 5,000 feet and rhododendron thickets cloaked forest streams.

These forests have long been affected and shaped by a variety of natural factors, including wind, ice, snow, drought and infrequent lightning-caused fires. But unrestrained logging, huge fires in the logging slash and chestnut blight brought drastic changes to the forests throughout the Black Mountains in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These impacts were followed in the 1950s by the arrival of the balsam woolly adelgid, an insect native to central Europe. The adelgids infested and killed large numbers of the Fraser firs, permanently altering the forest ecology in the highest elevations of the Black Mountains. Today, scientists have determined that air pollution and acid-laden precipitation are also contributing to the long term decline of Mount Mitchell's spruce-fir forests. In fact, on eight out of 10 days, Mount Mitchell is covered in clouds and fog that are sometimes as acidic as vinegar. Faced with a combination of stresses, the forests of the Black Mountains have been irreparably altered.

The forests we see today are quite different from those documented by Mitchell and Michaux; but in spite of the losses suffered over the last century, the flora of Mount Mitchell remains among the most distinctive and diverse in the Southern Appalachians. The park protects

the most extensive assortment of rare plant and animal species in the state park system, and the spruce-fir forests, while greatly diminished, are still present. Red spruce, fire cherry, yellow birch, mountain ash and mountain maple have filled gaps opened by the loss of Fraser fir and other native plant species such as blueberry, mountain raspberry, red elder and bush honeysuckle produce beautiful blossoms and lend fragrance to the air. Wildflowers, including ox-eye daisy, white snakeroot, purple-fringed orchid, St. John's wort and pink turtlehead color the landscape.

Like the flora, the fauna of Mount Mitchell is abundant and diverse. Bird watchers have recorded 91 species in the park. Birds more characteristic of New England and Canada—including winter wrens, slate-colored juncos, red crossbills and golden-crowned kinglets nest at these high altitudes. Spring and summer bring the drumming of ruffed grouse.

Trails

Hiking: Choose between a short stroll or a long hike into the woods. Hikers should wear appropriate clothing and carry proper gear as the high altitude makes the climate of Mount Mitchell chilly, even in summer.

A short trail beginning at the summit parking lot leads to the observation area. On a clear day, visitors can see as far as 85 miles and enjoy spectacular views of the surrounding mountains and the Pisgah National Forest.

Horseback riding: Although no horses are permitted inside the park, horseback riders can enjoy a trail that travels along the perimeter of the park. For more information, contact the US Forest Service Appalachian Ranger District, (828) 689-8716.



History Highlights

Long before explorers left Europe in search of the New World, various Native American tribes inhabited the Black Mountains. But in the mid-1700s, settlers primarily of Scotch-Irish and English origin moved to the area.

In 1787, French botanist Andre Michaux journeyed to the Black Mountains to seek the region's most valuable plants so the French government could cultivate them on royal plantations. Michaux collected more than 2,500 specimens of trees, shrubs and other plants. At about the same time that his French counterpart explored the area, Englishman John Fraser collected plants from the region to introduce to his native land. It was for this botanical explorer that the most abundant tree along the crest of the Black Mountains—the Fraser fir—was named.

Though botany was the first discipline to be explored in the Black Mountains, it was physical geography, particularly the measuring of mountains, which had the greatest impact on the history of Mount Mitchell. In 1835, Dr. Elisha Mitchell, a science professor at the University of North Carolina, made an excursion to the area to measure the mountain elevations. At the time, Grandfather Mountain was assumed to be the highest point in the region, but previous trips to the area had persuaded Mitchell that the Black Mountains were higher.


Through the use of barometric pressure readings and mathematical formulas, Mitchell figured the highest elevation of the range to be 6,476 feet, higher than that of Grandfather Mountain. Subsequent visits to the Black Mountains in 1838 and 1844 led Dr. Mitchell to calculate the height of the peak at 6,672 feet, amazingly, only a mere 12 feet in error of modern calculations.

In the 1850s, controversy arose about which peak in the range was the highest. Thomas Clingman, a former student of Dr. Mitchell's and a United States senator, set the elevation of the highest peak at 6,941 feet and insisted that Mitchell had measured another peak. In 1857, Dr. Mitchell returned to the Black Mountains to verify his measurements. While hiking across the mountain, he fell from a

Camping

Family camping: The nine-site family campground is open May 1 through October 31 with full facilities. Winter camping is available the remainder of the year with limited facilities. Only tent camping is allowed. Each site is equipped with a grill and picnic table. Restrooms are located nearby. Showers and hot water are not provided.

Pack-in camping: Campers may leave vehicles in the park overnight to backpack into the Pisgah National Forest. Visitors who leave their vehicles in the park must register on the forms provided at the trailheads near the parking area or at the park office. Mount Mitchell offers a choice of trails from which to enjoy the nearby alpine woodlands.



Make a reservation online
at ncparks.gov or call
1-877-7-CAMP-NC
(1-877-722-6762).



cliff above a 40-foot waterfall. Knocked unconscious by the fall, Dr. Mitchell drowned in the water below. In honor of his work, the highest peak in the Black Mountain range was given his name in 1858. Though originally buried in Asheville, Mitchell's body was reburied years later at the summit of Mount Mitchell.

Until the late 1800s, the Black Mountains remained largely in a wilderness state. The only apparent influence of man upon the environment was a reduced animal population caused by increased settlement and hunting. This lack of exploitation of natural resources was not to last, however. By the early 1900s, extensive logging operations had denuded much of the Black Mountain range. Logging activity had expanded rapidly by 1913 and citizens began to voice their alarm over the destruction of the forest. Foremost among them was Locke Craig, governor of North Carolina from 1913 to 1917.

In 1915, a bill was introduced establishing Mount Mitchell as the first state park. The legislation passed both houses and on March 3, 1915, the state parks system came into being.

In appreciation of Governor Craig's efforts, the second highest peak east of the Mississippi, with an elevation of 6,647 feet and also in North Carolina, was named Mount Craig.

Nature's Classroom

Rangers hold regularly scheduled educational and interpretive programs about Mount Mitchell State Park. Contact the park office to arrange a special exploration of Mount Mitchell State Park for your group or class.

Educational materials about Mount Mitchell State Park have been developed for grades 3 – 6 and are correlated to North Carolina's competency-based curriculum in science, social studies, mathematics and English/language arts. The program introduces students to the forest types of the Blue Ridge Mountains, focusing on the potential causes for forest decline in the mountains and at Mount Mitchell. Accompanying the program is a teacher's booklet, which is free to educators.

Rules & Regulations

Make your visit a safe and rewarding experience. Some of our regulations are posted for the protection of our visitors and our park. A complete list is available at the park office.

- The removal or destruction of any plant, animal, artifact, rock or mineral is prohibited.
- All areas managed by the Division of Parks and Recreation are wildlife preserves. Hunting and trapping are prohibited.
- Fireworks are not permitted.
- Firearms and other weapons are prohibited except that those with a proper permit may possess a concealed handgun in permitted areas and under the requirements of North Carolina G.S. 14-415.11. All firearms and weapons are prohibited in visitor centers & park offices.
- Camping and fires are allowed in designated areas by permit only.
- The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- Pets must be on an attended leash no longer than six feet.
- North Carolina motor vehicle and traffic laws apply in the park.
- Please stay on designated trails. Many rare plants live on thin soils and wet rocks, and they are vulnerable to damage from climbing, trampling and scraping.
- Do not litter. Help maintain a clean environment by placing trash in proper receptacles. State law requires aluminum cans and plastic bottles to be placed in a recycling container.

See the Division's website for a full listing of Rules and Regulations at www.ncparks.gov

Safety

To prevent accidents, remember the following safety tips:

- **WINTER ADVISORY:** Road closures on the Blue Ridge Parkway are common in winter. Vehicle access can be limited to the junction of NC highway 80 and the Blue Ridge Parkway south to Mount Mitchell. Weather can vary widely, from a clear day to a week-long blizzard.

Trails are often covered with snow and/or ice. Extreme caution should be taken when winter hiking here because of possible life threatening conditions. Your physical condition, equipment and forecasted weather conditions should be considered before planning a trip. During periods of extreme winter weather, rescue personnel may not be able to provide assistance.
- Dress properly. The climate of Mount Mitchell is cold and temperatures can fluctuate drastically in all seasons. To guard against hypothermia, warm clothing, rain gear, and adequate food and water should be carried on all hikes of two hours or more.
- When hiking, stay on designated trails and away from cliff faces.
- Should you plan a long hike or side trip, make your plans known to park staff.
- Remember that daylight hours are shorter in the fall and winter. Allow plenty of time for a hike to avoid being caught by darkness.
- Be alert to approaching storms & seek appropriate shelter.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or for an explanation of park rules.

Welcome!

There are a few places in the world that still stand apart from the ordinary. Rising more than a mile high, surrounded by the gentle mist of low-hanging clouds, Mount Mitchell State Park is one of these extraordinary places.

At the crest of the timeworn Black Mountains lies the summit of Mount Mitchell, the highest point east of the Mississippi. For those who ascend this mighty peak, what looms in the horizon is a feast for the eyes – breathtaking views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, rolling ridges and fertile valleys. Forested and forever misty, 2,000-acre Mount Mitchell State Park will provide you with some of the most tranquil moments you'll ever experience.



Park Hours

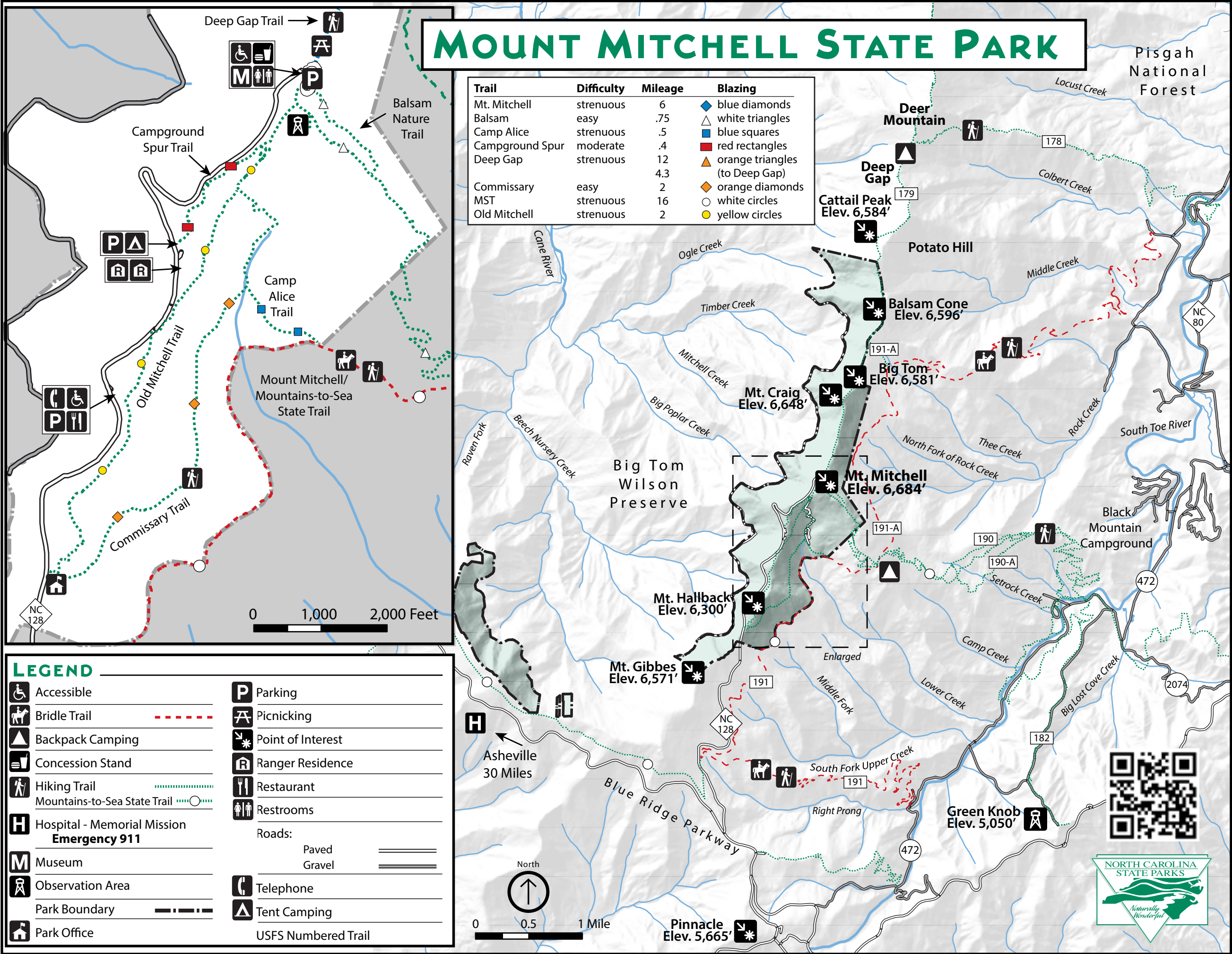
November - February 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
March, April, September & October 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
May - August 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Closed Christmas Day

Contact Information

Mount Mitchell State Park
2388 State Highway 128
Burnsville, NC 28714
(828) 675-4611
mount.mitchell@ncparks.gov
www.ncparks.gov

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources
1615 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615
(919) 707-9300

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N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
Department of Environment and Natural Resources



STATE PARK MITCHELL MOUNT MITCHELL STATE PARK



Mount Mitchell State Park is located in Yancey County, 33 miles north of Asheville off the Blue Ridge Parkway at mile marker #355.

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